Depression

Depression is a worldwide mental health problem. It causes people to experience persistent low moods, feelings of diminished self-worth, disturbed sleep, a lack of appetite, and poor concentration. Essentially, depression affects a person's everyday life, making it difficult to enjoy the things they usually would. This welfare information pack provides you with some useful information about depression, its causes and how to manage it, helping you remember that you are #NotAlone.

THE DRINKS TRUST
EST. 1886

#NotAlone

30% of respondents reported that they felt depressed or listless

(Understanding Mental Health Issues and Needs within the UK Drinks Industry, Benevolent, 2018)

What is depression?

Depression is defined as a persistent low mood, that lasts for two weeks or more. Everyone experiences moments in their lives when they feel low, but when this becomes recurrent and interferes with your everyday life, it could be a sign that you are experiencing depression.

At its mildest, depression doesn't prevent you from working and socialising, but it can make things more challenging. At its most severe, it can be life threatening, making you feel as though there is no point in living.

Crucially, depression can affect anyone, at any age and at any time. It does not discriminate. Some of the most successful people in the world experience depression, emphasising that depression exists on a spectrum.

The more we talk about depression, the better we can understand it so that those who are suffering know that there is support out there. For too long, people have misunderstood depression as something that you can 'get over' and 'pull yourself out of' but in reality, depression is a serious long-term illness that affects millions of people worldwide. Fortunately, with the right support and resources, you can make a full recovery.

Causes of Depression

There is no one, single cause of depression. It varies from person to person due to everyone's differing life experiences. However, some possible causes/triggers might include...

- **Stressful life events** - divorce, bereavement, illness, redundancy, and debt.
- **Personality traits** - low self-worth or low self-esteem can mean you are more susceptible to developing depression.
- **Family history** - if one of your relatives has experienced depression, this increases your likelihood of developing it.
- **Loneliness** - being cut off from friends and family.
- **Substance abuse** - using alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism for your depression.
- **Illness** - you may be more susceptible to depression if you have a long-term or progressive illness such as cancer, dementia, chronic pain etc.

Common Signs and Symptoms

Psychological

- Tearful and upset
- Restless, agitated and irritable
- Empty or numb
- Isolated
- No pleasure in the things you usually enjoy
- Hopeless and despairing
- Suicidal

Behavioural

- Avoiding social events and activities
- Self-harming
- Difficulty concentrating and remembering things
- Using tobacco, alcohol or drugs more than usual
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling tired all of the time
- No appetite - losing weight, or eating too much and gaining weight
- Physical aches and pains

Social

- Not performing well at work
- Avoiding contact with friends and family
- Not participating in your hobbies and interests
- Difficulties in your home and family life

Self-Care Tips

With depression, it can be challenging to find the energy to look after yourself. However, by taking proactive steps in coping with your experience, you may begin to feel better. Below are some lifestyle tips that might help improve your low mood and experience of depression:

1. Take care of yourself

- This is probably the most important piece of advice. For those who experience depression, you often sleep badly, eat too little or too much, avoid physical activity and do not prioritise hygiene. However, by ensuring that you get a good sleep, have a balanced diet, engage in some form exercise and prioritise small things, like taking a shower, you can think more clearly, boost your energy levels and most importantly improve your mood. Even if taking care of yourself means engaging in yoga for 10 minutes or ensuring you don't miss breakfast, it is all important for your body to function at its best.

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2. Practice Self-Help Exercises

- Make a list/mind map of all the activities, people and places that make you feel happy, then you could try and incorporate these positive influences into your everyday life. For example, you might arrange to see a friend.

- Treat yourself to something you enjoy, be that reading, gardening, baking, taking a long bath. Make the time to incorporate this into your day.

- Try and reach out to the people you love, even if you just need some company or someone to talk to for a while. If you would rather speak to someone unfamiliar, try joining a self-help group. People often find that when they share their experience with others who are experiencing similar feelings, it can be supportive and reduce feelings of isolation.

- Adult Colouring is similar to mediation as it allows us to switch our brains off, focusing only on the moment, thereby alleviating sadness and anxiety. For those who are less comfortable with expressive art forms, they can feel safe in this artistic process.

- Create your own happiness toolkit - this might include objects, thoughts, photos or anything that cheers you up when you are feeling down. Although it might feel strange putting something like this together, it is something to turn to whenever you are feeling low.

3. Challenge your depression

- The problem with depression is that it overwhelms any positive thoughts you might have, resulting in negative thinking, which impacts how you see yourself and your future. These negative thoughts are also known as cognitive distortions. For example, you make a mistake at work and from then on you tell yourself that 'I am a failure at everything I try and do'. However, this specific distortion is what is known as overgeneralisation - believing you are a failure because of one mistake.

- Faulty, negative thinking is at the core of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Therapists will try and encourage you to refute these cognitive distortions, asking you to rationalise your negative thoughts about a situation. For example,
i. What would I tell a friend who thought this?
ii. How might I look at this situation differently if I didn't have depression?

- You can practice this new way of thinking in your own time. Try and catch yourself when these cognitive distortions emerge and focus on the positives of the situation. For example, think about where you did something well or where you could improve in the future.

- People often diminish their successes by arguing its down to 'luck' or 'someone else', but if you say something like 'I worked really hard for that', you begin to value your self-worth. The more you challenge negative thinking, the less cognitive distortions will arise, until eventually you can embrace a more positive outlook on yourself and your life.

Treatment (Medication/Therapy)

If you have attempted self-help techniques, but feel as though they are not working, it is important that you consult with your GP. They can provide you with extra support and resources to help you get on the right track. Some common options that your GP might recommend, include...

Medication:

- Anti-Depressant Medication e.g. selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)

Therapy:

- Individual, group based or computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.
- Interpersonal Therapy
- Behavioural activation therapy
- Mindfulness Training

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Useful Resources

Big White Wall www.bigwhitewall.com
Online community for adults experiencing emotional or psychological distress. It is free to use in many areas if you live in the UK, if you're a student or if you have a referral from your GP.

Cruse Bereavement Care www.cruse.org.uk
0844 477 9400
Charity providing information and support after someone you know has died.

Depression UK www.depressionuk.org
A self-help organisation made up of individuals and local groups.

Do-it www.do-it.org
UK volunteering opportunities, including environment and conservation options.

Elefriends www.elefriends.org.uk
Elefriends is a friendly, supportive online community for people experiencing a mental health problem.

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) www.napac.org.uk
0808 801 0331 (freephone from landline and mobiles)
A charity supporting adult survivors of any form of childhood abuse. Provides a support line and local support services.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) www.nice.org.uk
Guidelines on treatments for depression.

NCT www.nct.org.uk
0300 330 0700
National charity for parents, providing information and support for all parents.

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk
Provides information on treatments for depression available through the NHS.

Samaritans www.samaritans.org
Chris, PO Box 9090, Stirling FK8 2SA
helpline: 116 123
jo@samaritans.org
A 24-hour telephone helpline for people struggling to cope.

Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk
Information about volunteering opportunities in England.

Volunteering Wales www.volunteering-wales.net
Information about volunteering opportunities in Wales.

How can we help?

Speak to your line manager or HR department about how you are feeling. If you are worried about their reaction, get in touch with us. We can support them to be open to the discussion without prejudice or judgement.

Speak to a professional counsellor on our confidential helpline. They will find the best way to help you:

0800 915 4610

8am - 8pm, seven days a week